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# Writer's Challenge 2

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 House of Cards  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

## WRITER'S CHALLENGE

I think a lot of people *want* to make cool, creative decks. The problem comes when those people show up to Friday Night **Magic** sporting a red-white **Skirk Fire Marshal** deck only to face blue-green madness deck after **Psychatog** deck after monoblack-control deck. A few really good cards can make a few really good decks possible and subsequently squeeze out room for new ideas. Because tournaments put deck ideas to the test, a lot of casual **Magic** players will decide to wait and see what decks rise to the top, and then copy them to play with their friends. A few royal spankings later, and the person with the Skirk deck will be cruising his or her sideboard looking for something that will beat a monoblack control deck.

As a result, a lot of small groups of **Magic** players start to take on the appearance of a tournament "metagame" (unnecessarily, in my opinion -- but that's a whole different article). If I had a dime for every time someone complained to me about their friends always copying decks from the Internet for their weekly play sessions and that the decks lack creativity, then . . . well . . . I would have a big stack of dimes.

Thankfully, small groups don't have to play by tournament rules. Sometimes you need to take matters into your own hands and force creativity on people. An effective -- but dangerous -- way to create a fresh environment in which to make decks is to supply your own home-brewed Banned and Restricted List.

I say that a personal Banned and Restricted Lists is an "effective" remedy because dropping even one good card from a stable environment can drastically change the available decks in that environment. For example, ask someone over at the *Sideboard* what dropping **Wonder** from *Odyssey Block Constructed* would do. Ask Anthony what banning **Congregate** did for his group games. Undoubtedly, these kinds of pivotal cards exist in your playgroup, and banning or restricting them for an evening (or a week or a month or forever) will definitely open the door for new deck ideas.

I say that a personal Banned and Restricted List is a "dangerous" remedy for two reasons.

First, it's dangerous because usually the changes you make to an environment are entirely unpredictable. Maybe banning **Ensnaring Bridge** from your playgroup means your friend Dave creates an entirely new deck that you hate to play against even *more* than his stupid monored burn deck.

Banned and Restricted Lists start a process that reminds me of trying to hide something from my wife: One lie about whether I sent the rent check on time means I have to lie again when the landlord calls. Which means I then have to tell my friend Dan that he supposedly called last night and on and on. Before you know it, I'm a used car salesman in Albuquerque with a dog named Heathcliff wondering "What the hell happened?" Trust me.

Which is all to say the Banned and Restricted Lists *can* inject new life into otherwise stale and stagnant **Magic** games. But all too often the problem is actually uncreative and stagnant *players*, not the decks with which they're playing. Use caution: Buyer beware. But if you feel some drastic change is needed, then by all means, full speed ahead.

To illustrate the unpredictability of change, I performed the following experiment. I sat some fellows down -- let's call them Aaron, Mark, Anthony, Brian, Randy, Rune, Bennie, and Ben -- and asked them each to make me a deck for Standard using *Legions* cards. Not just any deck, though. This deck had the following Banned and Restricted Lists:

### BANNED:

- All nonwhite *Odyssey* cards
- **Astral Slide**
- **Burning Wish**
- **Cunning Wish**
- **Living Wish**
- **Wonder**

### RESTRICTED:

- **Birds of Paradise**
- **Cabal Coffers**



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I wanted to see what would happen if I neutered pretty much every deck that has recently won a major tournament in competitive play. The yahoos I asked follow tournament **Magic** pretty closely, apparently, and can be tainted by its presence.

One caveat: I should be honest to say that I'm not really sure these people can make good decks. I pretty much pulled them off the street, and they're a fairly surly looking lot. Oh well. This was an experiment.

The results were interesting.

First up is Ben. In his mind, the Banned and Restricted Lists above opened the door for red. Lots and lots of red.

### Sligh

by Ben Bleiweiss

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>4 <b>Bloodstained Mire</b></p> <p>10 <b>Mountain</b></p> <p>4 <b>Wooded Foothills</b></p> <hr/> <p>18 lands</p>	<p>4 <b>Blistering Firecat</b></p> <p>4 <b>Goblin Piledriver</b></p> <p>4 <b>Goblin Sledder</b></p> <p>4 <b>Grim Lavamancer</b></p> <p>4 <b>Raging Goblin</b></p> <p>4 <b>Skirk Marauder</b></p> <p>4 <b>Sparksmith</b></p> <hr/> <p>28 creatures</p>	<p>4 <b>Chain of Plasma</b></p> <p>2 <b>Lava Dart</b></p> <p>4 <b>Shock</b></p> <p>4 <b>Volcanic Hammer</b></p> <hr/> <p>14 other spells</p>
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Ben describes his deck like so: "Sligh sligh sligh. Sligh sligh, sligh SLIGH sligh sligh. Burn sligh sligh Goblin sligh. Sligh sligh, sligh sligh sligh sligh. Sligh sligh sideways, sligh sligh +2/+0, sligh sligh."

In retrospect, I guess a lot of people would see my Banned and Restricted Lists and make a deck along these lines. Aaron, however, is trickier than Ben. He anticipated Ben's deck and came up with:

### Rotlung's Wrath

by Aaron Forsythe

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>1 <b>City of Brass</b></p> <p>12 <b>Plains</b></p> <p>2 <b>Secluded Steppe</b></p> <p>1 <b>Starlit Sanctum</b></p> <p>6 <b>Swamp</b></p> <hr/> <p>22 lands</p>	<p>4 <b>Beloved Chaplain</b></p> <p>4 <b>Benevolent Bodyguard</b></p> <p>3 <b>Cabal Archon</b></p> <p>2 <b>Devoted Caretaker</b></p> <p>4 <b>Master Apothecary</b></p> <p>1 <b>Planar Guide</b></p> <p>4 <b>Rotlung Reanimator</b></p> <p>1 <b>Teroh's Faithful</b></p> <p>4 <b>Weathered Wayfarer</b></p> <hr/> <p>27 creatures</p>	<p>3 <b>Oversold Cemetery</b></p> <p>4 <b>Shared Triumph</b></p> <p>4 <b>Wrath of God</b></p> <hr/> <p>11 other spells</p>
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His reasoning: "The interaction between Rotlung and Wrath is so saucy. Seeing as Goblins looks to be the best deck under your list, it makes sense to play something that can cream Goblins."

See what starts to happen? I blew up the tried and true decks, and already I have a face off between two kinds of decks that would annoy me. I could ban **Master Apothecary**, **Rotlung Reanimator**, and **Goblin Piledriver**, I guess, but there's that slippery slope again.

Bennie came up with three decks, actually (Darned overachievers . . . sheesh. Who comes up with *three* decks? Oh. Right. Nevermind). The first was a Clerics deck focusing on **Dark Supplicant** and **Scion of Darkness**. The second was a morph deck using **Dermoplasm** and **Skirk Alarmist** much like I described [last week](#). The third deck is "chock full of synergy, especially nice are the **Wirewood Heralds** that sac and fetch the Caller at the same time it gives another Bear token. The idea here was not to sit back and use the Caller defensively but to use it offensively alongside **Nantuko Husk**. One other option is to swap the **Braids** out for **Graveborn Muse** and swap out the Husks for **Fallen Angels** (that are oh-so **Smother** resistant). I suspect that Braids is stronger, but I don't know."

### Death Is but a Door

by Bennie Smith

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**Main Deck**  
64 cards

6 Forest	4 Faceless Butcher	4 Duress
14 Swamp	2 Caller of the Claw	2 Cabal Therapy
4 Tainted Wood	1 Elvish Lyryst	1 Chainer's Edict
	4 Faceless Butcher	4 Smother
24 lands	4 Mesmeric Fiend	
	4 Nantuko Husk	11 other spells
	3 Stronghold Assassin	
	4 Wirewood Herald	
	3 Withered Wretch	
	29 creatures	

Finally, the annoying guy who's always asking us why we don't play multiplayer more often showed up with a deck:

Serious Effectiveness		
by Anthony Alongi		
<b>Main Deck</b>		
60 cards		
4 Contested Cliffs	4 Anurid Scavenger	3 Aether Charge
4 Forest	4 Aquamoeba	4 Liquify
8 Island	2 Genesis	7 other spells
2 Mountain	2 Gurzigost	
4 Tranquil Thicket	4 Ravenous Baloth	
4 Wooded Foothills	4 Riptide Mangler	
26 lands	3 Scalpelexis	
	4 Wirewood Savage	
	27 creatures	

He's also kind of a blabbermouth, but I'll give you the high points of his deck description: "Thanks for banning **Aether Burst**, dork . . . The deck has three ways to win: combat damage, **Aether Charge** damage, and **Scalpelexis** mill. Not many normal Standard decks are that flexible . . . If Aaron gives us the cards, I'll even get onto a friend's account and try it on **Magic Online** against your best effort."

Anyway, as you might expect, Anthony's words were enough to get me riled. We all played a vocal round-robin tournament, and I won handily with my Kamahl-Goblin Sharpshooter deck. It wasn't close, actually. They all cried. Really.

If you can't already tell by my cautionary tone, I hesitate to recommend Banned and Restricted Lists as a strategy to produce creative decks. But it *can* work out wonderfully, especially if the lists are dynamic. For example, my Banned and Restricted List worked okay -- I didn't see a single **Psychatog**, **Wild Mongrel**, **Wonder**, or **Astral Slide** anywhere. In fact, I saw four decks I probably wouldn't see in a tournament setting. But I bet I would get sick of Goblins, Clerics, **Nantuko Husk**, and **Scalpelexis**. A solution might be to make up a new Banned and Restricted Lists -- or even better: Let someone else think of one -- to shake things up. Like I said, banning and restricting cards produces unpredictable results. If you can find a way to make that unpredictability work for you to make **Magic** fun rather than set a different boring standard, I'm all for it.

Ah, but wait! There is another lesson here. I said earlier that homebrewed Banned and Restricted Lists are dangerous for *two* reasons. Besides their unpredictable nature, you run the great risk of making people mad or disinterested. Did you notice how many people I extended the invitation to? Eight. And how many actually built decks? Four. That's half the folks who decided they liked their **Burning Wishes** and **Battle of Wits** too much to play my mental game. Banned and Restricted Lists can be fun for you and decidedly the opposite for your friends. Buyer beware.

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